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ABSTRACT

A study examined the relationship of length of vocational agriculture teacher contract to supervised occupational experience program scope and Future Farmers of America (FFA) chapter activity level. A questionnaire measuring the activity level of the FFA chapter and soliciting information on various extraneous variables was administered to the entire central Florida vocational agriculture teacher population (56 teachers). A second questionnaire sought information from high school seniors regarding the scope of their supervised occupational experience programs and the number of supervisory teacher visits they received. Also collected were data concerning length of teaching contract and number of years of teaching experience. Based on analyses of these data, it was concluded that there is a positive relationship between supervised occupational experience program scope and the following independent variables: length of teacher contract, teacher having had high school vocational education, percentage of students from rural areas, teacher assistance with fairs, and number of supervisory home visits. The same positive relationship was observed between the above-mentioned independent variables and level of FFA chapter activity. Recommendations include calls for additional similar studies, evaluation of the effects of vocational agriculture summer programs, and longitudinal studies to examine program outcomes. (MN)

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RELATIONSHIP OF LENGTH OF VOCATIONAL AGRICULTURE TEACHER CONTRACT TO SUPERVISED OCCUPATIONAL EXPERIENCE PROGRAM SCOPE AND FFA CHAPTER ACTIVITY LEVEL*

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INTRODUCTION

The summer program of vocational agriculture has been recognized by agricultural educators as a key component of the total vocational agriculture program since the passage of the Smith-Hughes Act in 1917. The act that initiated federal support for vocational agriculture in public schools specifically mandated that all students engage in a minimum of six months of supervised farming. It was recognized that supervised farming programs and agricultural production activity continued beyond the normal school year and that vocational agriculture teachers should be employed to utilize the opportunities for educational experience available during this time. In addition, the summer has provided opportunities to supplement leadership training and agricultural knowledge through FFA contests, livestock shows, conventions, and other group activities. However, it is alarming to find that less than one-third of the states have 100 percent of their vocational agriculture teachers employed on a 12-month basis.

PURPOSE/HYPOTHESES

The purpose of this study was to determine if the extent to which vocational agriculture teachers are employed on a 12-month basis is related to both FFA chapter activity level and supervised occupational experience program scope. The following hypotheses directed the research:

1. There is a positive relationship between the extent to which vocational agriculture teachers are employed on a 12-month basis and the scope of supervised occupational experience programs.

2. There is a positive relationship between the extent to which vocational agriculture teachers are employed on a 12-month basis and the FFA chapter activity level.

The following extraneous variables were investigated in examining the research hypotheses in this ex post facto study:

1. length of teaching experience
2. percentage of students living in rural areas
3. teacher perception of release time available for FFA activities
4. teacher perception of travel money available
5. number of supervisory home visits per student
6. teacher having a part-time job
7. extent to which teacher had vocational agriculture in high school
8. teacher assistance with fairs

METHODOLOGY

The population for the study consisted of all senior high vocational agriculture teachers in central Florida (Region III). Because of the relatively small size of the target population (56 teachers), a census of the teachers was used for data collection. In addition to the primary sample of teachers, a secondary sample was utilized which was comprised of each teacher's 12th grade students.

Two questionnaires were used in the study. The first, adapted from an instrument developed by Swanson (1979), was used to measure the activity level of FFA chapters. This instrument is designed to yield a single FFA activity score for each school. In addition, this questionnaire gathered information on the following extraneous variables: percentage of students living in a rural area, teacher perception of release time and travel money available, teacher having a part-time job, extent to which the teacher had vocational agriculture in high school, and teacher assistance with fairs. Field testing of the questionnaire yielded a reliability coefficient of .84.

The second questionnaire was designed to gather information from 12th grade students regarding the scope of supervised occupational experience programs and the number of supervisory teacher visits they received. This questionnaire was adapted from a questionnaire used by Morton (1978) and was used to determine the average SOEP scope of the 12th grade students in each program.

A third source of data in the study was the Florida Agribusiness and Natural Resources Educational Personnel Data and Class Schedule Form. This form was utilized to collect data regarding two variables: length of teaching contract and number of years teaching experience.

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Characteristics Of Teachers

Table I illustrates that of the 46 teachers included in the study, 21 (45.7 percent) were employed on a 12-month contract, 4 (8.7 percent) were employed on an 11-month contract, and 21 (45.7 percent) were employed on a 10-month contract. The majority (60.7 percent) of the teachers had taught vocational agriculture in their present school for five years or less. The mean number of years teaching experience for the teachers in the study was 5.3.

The majority (56.5 percent) of the teachers had taken at least one year of high school vocational agriculture. Sixteen teachers (34.8 percent) had taken four years of high school vocational agriculture while 20 (43.5 percent) had not taken vocational agriculture in high school. Most teachers (56.5 percent) were teaching in schools where 50 percent or less of their students were from a rural area. Fifteen teachers (32.6 percent) were in schools where over 75 percent of the students come from a rural area.

TABLE I

Frequencies and Summary Statistics for Length of Teaching Contract (Teachers)

Length of Contract	Frequencies		
	N	%	Cum. %
10-month contract	21	45.7	45.7
11-month contract	4	8.7	54.3
12-month contract	21	45.7	100.0
Total	46	100.0	100.0

The typical vocational agriculture teacher in the study did not have a part-time job, assisted with fairs, perceived his/her principal's willingness to provide leave time as more than adequate, and perceived his/her travel budget as being adequate. In addition, the typical teacher had averaged visiting senior supervised occupational experience projects twice in 1980.

Relationship Between The Major Variables And Supervised Occupational Experience Program Scope

Pearson product moment correlation coefficients and stepwise multiple regression analysis were used to test the hypothesis that there is a positive relationship between length of teaching contract and supervised occupational experience program scope. Table II shows Pearson product moment correlation coefficients computed between all possible pairs of variables using teacher as the unit of analysis. Findings revealed that there was a positive relationship between supervised occupational experience program scope and the following independent variables:

1. length of teaching contract (r=.66)
2. teacher having high school vocational agriculture (r=.27)
3. percentage of students from a rural area (r=.51)
4. teacher assistance with fairs (r=.30)
5. number of supervisory home visits (r=.45)

Stepwise multiple regression was used to enter each independent variable into the multiple regression equation as a separate step with supervised occupational experience program scope as the dependent variable. Of the total explained variation in supervised occupational experience program scope (.59), 75 percent could be explained by length of teaching contract, 16 percent could be explained by percentage of students from a rural area, 3.7 percent could be explained by length of teaching experience, and 3 percent could be explained by teachers having high school vocational agriculture. The remaining variables were each explaining less than one percent of the variation in supervised occupational experience scope.

The F test was used to test for statistically significant relationships between supervised occupational experience program scope and the independent variables. Supervised occupational experience program scope was significantly related with length of teaching contract at the .01 level and percentage of students from a rural area at the .05 level when all other variables were statistically controlled. Therefore, the research hypothesis that stated there was a positive relationship between length of teaching contract and supervised occupational experience program scope can be accepted at the .01 level of significance.

TABLE II

Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficients for the Major Variables with Teacher as the Unit of Analysis (n = 46)

	SOEP	CONTRA	EXPER	VOAG	RURAL	FAIR	JOB	PETI	PEMO
CONTRA	.663***								
EXPER	.128	-.070							
VOAG	.274*	.152	-.066						
RURAL	.512***	.337**	.065	.219					
FAIR	.295*	.219	.175	.191	.349**				
JOB	-.220	-.337**	.008	.061	-.168	-.261*			
PETI	.170	.000	.188	.139	.278*	.137	.130		
PEMO	.021	-.165	.049	.187	.079	-.097	.351**	.243*	
VISITS	.450***	.456***	.234	.287*	.211	.384**	.001	-.015	-.131

Note. CONTRA = Length of teaching contract; RURAL = percentage of students from a rural area; EXPER = length of teaching experience; VOAG = years the teacher had high school vocational agriculture; VISITS = average number of home visits per student; PEMO = perception of travel money; PETI = perception of release time available; JOB = teacher having a part-time job; SOEP = supervised occupational experience program scope; FAIR = teacher assistance with fairs.

* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$
*** $p < .001$

Relationship Between The Major Variables And FFA Chapter Activity Level

Pearson product moment correlation coefficients and step-wise multiple regression analysis were used to test the hypothesis that there is a positive relationship between length of teaching contract and FFA chapter activity level. Table III presents Pearson product moment correlation coefficients computed between all possible pairs of variables using schools as the unit of analysis. Findings revealed that there was a positive relationship between FFA chapter activity score and the following independent variables:

1. length of teaching contract (r=.54)
2. teacher having high school vocational agriculture (r=.33)
3. percentage of students from a rural area (r=.48)
4. teacher assistance with fairs (r=.49)
5. number of supervisory home visits (r=.48)

Stepwise multiple regression was used to enter each independent variable into the multiple regression equation as a separate step with FFA chapter activity score as the dependent variable. Of the total explained variation in FFA chapter activity level (.48), 60.3 percent could be explained by length of teaching contract, 18.4 percent could be explained by percentage of students from a rural area, 8.7 percent could be explained by perception of leave time available, 6.2 percent could be explained by teacher assistance with fairs, 2.7 percent could be explained by teacher having a part-time job, and 1.5 percent could be explained by teachers having high school vocational agriculture. The remaining variables were each explaining less than one percent of the variation in FFA chapter activity level.

The F test was used to test for statistically significant relationships between FFA chapter activity level and the independent variables. FFA chapter activity level was not significantly related with any of the independent variables at the .05 level of significance when other variables were held constant. Therefore, the research hypothesis which stated that there was a positive relationship between length of teaching contract and FFA chapter activity level cannot be accepted.

CONCLUSIONS

1. The dependence of supervised occupational experience programs on length of teaching contract indicates that schools desiring more effective supervised occupational experience programs should employ teachers on a 12-month contract.

2. It appears that teachers who have a higher percentage of students from a rural area have more of an opportunity to develop effective supervised occupational experience programs.

TABLE III

Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficients for the Major Variables with School as the Unit of Analysis (n = 26)

	FFA	CONTRA	EXPER	VOAG	RURAL	FAIR	JOB	PETI	PEMO
CONTRA	.538**								
EXPER	.080	.021							
VOAG	.329*	.198	-.170						
RURAL	.482**	.386*	.137	.313					
FAIR	.493**	.415*	.350*	.409*	.582***				
JOB	-.105	-.263	-.073	.022	-.211	-.372*			
PETI	.281	.068	.187	.061	.162	.087	.020		
PEMO	-.064	-.194	.162	.048	.089	.070	.162	.277	
VISITS	.478**	.570***	.297	.308	.273	.531**	.019	.118	-.051

Note. FFA = FFA chapter activity score; CONTRA = length of teaching contract; RURAL = percentage of students from a rural area; EXPER = length of teaching experience; VOAG = years the teachers had high school vocational agriculture; VISITS = average number of home visits per student; PEMO = perception of travel money, PETI = perception of release time available; JOB = teachers having a part-time job; FAIR= teacher assistance with fairs.

* p < .
** p < .01
*** p < .001

3. Twelve-month teachers provide more personalized instruction as indicated by a higher degree of participation with fairs and more supervisory home visits.

4. Students in 12-month programs of vocational agriculture are more active in the supervised occupational experience program and therefore are receiving more of an opportunity to develop skills in an occupational setting.

5. There are indications that communities desiring more active FFA chapters should employ teachers on 12-month contracts, employ teachers who are former high school vocational agriculture students, and encourage teachers to conduct supervisory home visits.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The following recommendations for further research are made on the basis of the findings of this study.

1. There is a need for similar studies to be conducted using other dependent measures such as level of adult and young farmer activity conducted by teachers and community attitudes toward vocational agriculture programs.

2. Since the primary purpose of the summer program is to provide students with the opportunity to gain competencies that could not be developed at any other time, research should examine student achievement in relationship to length of program. Is learning influenced by length of programs?

3. The need exists to examine the cost effectiveness of the summer program in vocational agriculture.

4. The need exists for teacher educators to consider the background of future teachers and provide additional experiences for those students who were not enrolled in high school vocational agriculture.

5. The need exists to examine the influence of length of program on job placement. Longitudinal studies should be conducted to determine if graduates of year-round programs are more successful in the labor market.

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